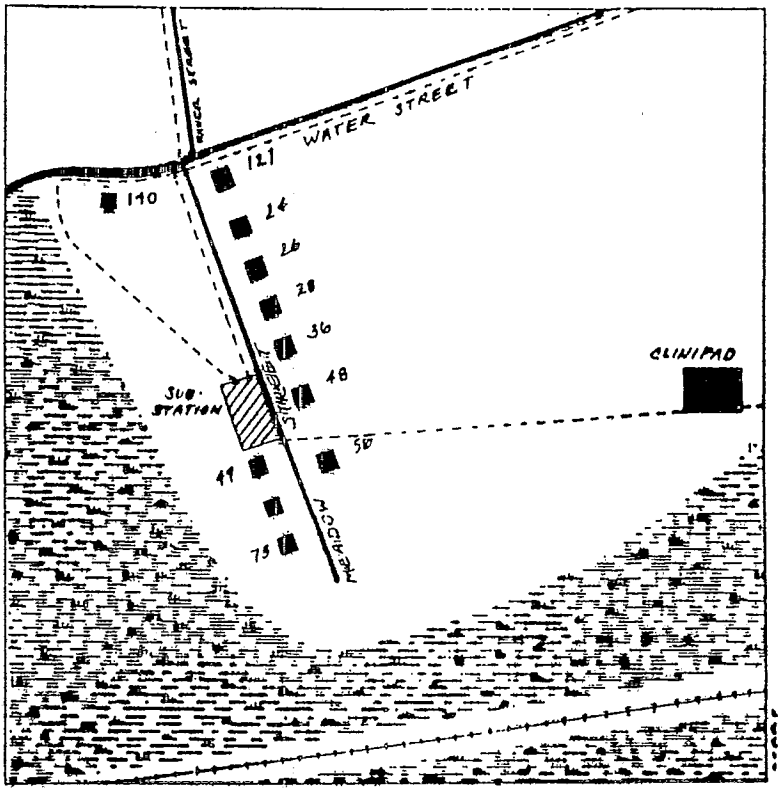
ANNALS OF RADIATION

CALAMITY ON MEADOW STREET



ON a Friday evening in mid-January of this year, Edna and Robert Hemstock received a visit at their home, in Guilford, Connecticut—a town on Long Island Sound about fourteen miles east of New Haven—from their friends Loretta and Fred Nelson, who also live in Guilford. Edna Hemstock, a vivacious woman in her middle forties, who is Robert's second wife, works as an office manager for a manufacturing firm; Robert Hemstock, a red-haired, forty-nine-year-old man of Irish ancestry, is a free-lance consultant for machinery design and product development. Loretta Nelson, a slender, sombre woman in her early forties, works at a nearby electronics plant; and Fred Nelson, an affable, wiry, gray-haired man of fifty-four, is an oil-burner serviceman. The two couples had become acquainted a year or so earlier, when the Nelsons' seventeen-year-old daughter, Joyce, and Charles Hemstock, Robert's twenty-year-old son by his first marriage, who had been living together in the Nelsons' house, on Meadow Street, learned that Joyce was pregnant. This was a cause of some concern to both sets of prospective grandparents, because in 1982 Joyce, who is called Missy by her family and friends, had been found to be suffering from the extremely rare combination of glomerulonephritis—a disease of the kidney capillaries, which

ounce girl. Sitting at the Hemstocks' kitchen table nearly three months later, Loretta Nelson made a point of remarking on how lucky they were to be grandparents, considering the threat that Joyce's kidney ailment had posed to her pregnancy. She added, "And considering all the other illness there's been on Meadow Street," which caused Bob Hemstock to sit up and take notice.

"That was the first time I'd heard anything about a lot of illness on Meadow Street," Hemstock said recently. "Edna and I had visited the Nelsons on several occasions while Missy was pregnant, and we had met their neighbor Suzanne Bullock, whose seventeen-year-old daughter, Melissa, had been operated on for brain cancer earlier that year, but neither of us knew

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